

REBUTTAL LANDSCAPE PROOF OF EVIDENCE

COTMOOR SOLAR FARM LAND NORTH OF HALLOUGHTON, SOUTHWELL, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

PROPOSAL: CONSTRUCTION OF A SOLAR FARM AND BATTERY STATIONS TOGETHER WITH ALL ASSOCIATED WORKS, EQUIPMENT AND NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE

ON BEHALF OF JBM SOLAR PROJECTS 6 LTD

TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED) PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004

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PLANNING | **DESIGN** | **ENVIRONMENT** | **ECONOMICS**

1. LANDSCAPE REBUTTAL

Environmental Statement

1.1 Subsequent to completing my Landscape Proof of Evidence, I have contributed to the Appellant's Environmental Statement as an Inquiry Document that sits alongside the Appellant's Landscape Proof of Evidence. The Environmental Statement addresses a limited number of environmental issues one of which relates to landscape and visual effects. In light of the request for this document, I have prepared a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which forms a chapter in the Environmental Statement. In undertaking this work and preparing the chapter and associated appendices, I have been supported by Caroline Roe in an assistant role. The LVIA in the ES assesses the determined scheme which is Revision L. It also assesses the revised, amended scheme which is based on Revision M layout. Analysis relating to the latter is documented in red text to clearly differentiate where there are differences between the two schemes, revisions L and M. This assessment provides a comprehensive but proportionate analysis with regard to likely significant effects relating to the two development scenarios and sets out in more detailed analysis with regard to landscape and visual issues than what is set out in my Proof. I therefore rely upon this up-to-date document which sits alongside my Proof of Evidence.

Land Use and Land Cover

1.2 In writing the ES LVIA, I note an error in my Proof which is corrected and clarified here. Paragraph 4.6 to paragraph 4.8 of my Proof is concerned with land use and land cover and relates to land use (pasture and arable). The title should refer to both pasture and arable.

1.3 Paragraph 4.8 correctly states that the susceptibility, value and resultant sensitivity are all rated as being medium. This, combined with a medium magnitude of change would result in a moderate adverse degree of effect with regard to land cover associated with the site. My analysis which I have set out above is based on a number of considerations relating to this aspect of the scheme, land use and land cover, and is noted in the following sub-paragraphs:

1.3.1 The land is currently farmed as pasture or arable land, on a rotation basis. The land management can change from arable to pasture as good farming practice without the requirement for planning permission.

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- 1.3.2 With the scheme as proposed, the land would be managed as pasture where the solar panels are located within the existing fields.
- 1.3.3 This land cover would be retained across the entire site, with the solar panels superimposed over this managed grassland.
- 1.3.4 This would be farm managed with sheep grazing to ensure that the grassland is appropriately managed and maintained for the lifetime of the project. Sheep are able to effectively graze across any of the grassland whether it is under the panels or between the panels themselves.
- 1.3.5 Throughout the life of the project the land would be farmed based on sheep grazing and therefore would remove any intensive arable farming practice.
- 1.3.6 The amount of actual loss of agricultural land as a result of the scheme would be negligible given the overall size of the site. Apart from the substation, inverter units and battery storage elements the only other infrastructure that would be superimposed over the grass sward would be the steel supports for the solar panels. The loss of agricultural land would amount to approximately 1% of the site area.
- 1.3.7 It is good practice to break the agricultural cultivation of the land with the land left fallow and retained as pasture to allow the soil ecology to recover. This scheme would allow the land to rest from arable use for the life of the project. With the land managed for grazing the sheep droppings as humus would allow the soil to become more enriched in soil habitat terms. At the end of the period the soil resource would be a better-quality enriched resource for farming as a consequence.
- 1.3.8 The physical form of grassland and its legibility (appearance) would remain with the solar panels in place. This conclusion accords with the LVIA Addendum (A13B) albeit incorporating slightly different judgements as to the sensitivity and magnitude of effect. It is nonetheless an overall effect with which the Council agrees; see paragraph 4.1.5 of Helen Jones' Proof of Evidence. Cathy Gillespie is also in agreement with this overall effect, see paragraph 4.1 of her Proof of Evidence.
- 1.3.9 The fields whether arable or pasture are currently free of built development with the exception of the 132kv overhead line and pylon

network, and therefore have a sense of openness associated with the field units. The introduction of the solar panels whilst extending across the topography at a maximum height of 3 metres above ground, they would nonetheless remove the sense of openness associated with the field units. It is this particular aspect that would result in an adverse nature of effect as it relates to land use and land cover as the actual physical impact and loss is negligible in scale across the entirety of the site as described above.

Landscape Character

- 1.4 The ES addresses effects on landscape character in more detail than my Landscape Proof of Evidence, in particular, that the effects upon landscape character become less over time. My proof addresses year 1 whereas the ES also addresses year 10 and the decommissioning phase in terms of landscape character. In terms of landscape character associated with the site, this is defined by the combination of various landscape elements principally topography, land use and land cover, hedgerows, tree cover and the configuration of the fields themselves, the field pattern is sometimes referred to as the "grain" of the landscape. With the exception of some small areas of development such as the substation and inverter and battery units which would require the loss of some agricultural land all of these landscape elements would be retained and remain as part of the landscape whilst the scheme is in place. It is accepted that where the panels would be located the continued agricultural use would be in the form of grazing rather than arable use.
- 1.5 The hedgerows would be reinforced with further hedgerow planting and the tree cover resource associated with the site would also be reinforced with additional tree planting. The hedgerows would be managed such that some of them would be maintained at a higher level than is currently the case.
- 1.6 The trees over the project lifetime, both those existing and those introduced as part of the landscape proposals would all continue to grow developing larger canopies apart from those trees that are already fully mature. This growth over a 40-year period which is a significant period of time for both hedgerow and tree growth would result in reinforcing the defining characteristics of the site, with regard to these features. Furthermore, the increased vegetation growth would create a stronger sense of physical and visual containment associated with the

site. This change is noted and reflected in the reduced visual effects that would come about over the project timescale.

- 1.7 Upon completion of the decommissioning phase, all built infrastructure would be removed both above and below ground across the entirety of the site with the exception of the substation which would remain as part of the essential National Grid distribution network infrastructure. The management and growth of the hedgerows and trees across the site would continue to remain as part of the landscape post decommissioning phase and would leave a positive legacy in terms of landscape character given that trees and hedgerows contribute to the landscape character locally.

Watercourses and Water Bodies

- 1.8 With regard to watercourses and water bodies, this is addressed in paragraph 4.12 of the Proof. With a high susceptibility and value and sensitivity combined with a low magnitude of change there would be a moderate beneficial degree of effect, not minor as stated at paragraph 4.12.
- 1.9 Paragraph 4.13 of the proof includes a table which should read for land cover and land use moderate adverse (not major adverse) and for water features moderate beneficial (not minor beneficial).